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a parable

A BIG FISH

by Hank Vlaardingerbroek

I recall it now as I experienced it as a small boy. A boy looking at the world on a day-to-day adventure with only thoughts of himself to make him happy or sad. The world was not much bigger than a couple of acres, and at eight years old that could have been a day of trudging in clover that smelled sweet, or playing near a small creek that looked like a river. The creek didn't meander through our acreage, though. I can't even recall where it went or where it came from, but it did have one slight bend where erosion had caused a knee-type bow. Here the water swelled somewhat and formed a murky quiet pool.

On the far bank of this knee-type bow stood a solitary tree as a guardian against further erosion. Several of its roots already hung nakedly in the water, and the tree leaned so precariously that it seemed to be in a state of giving up, as if at any moment it might topple into the pool. There weren't any other trees around, just some low hills which during a sweltering day were awfully exhausting to climb on one's way home for supper.

We may think of childhood as a time of almost unbroken happiness, free of the strivings, frustrations, and complexities which make adult life so burdensome. But when we look more closely, we discover that children too have their anxieties and discontents.

This little creek was the object of most of my dreams for several years. On its banks I could dream of the future, a future filled with hopes of what fifth and sixth grade would be like. A future, too, that wondered about the killings in movies and the excitement of watching "Wild Bill Hickok" through store windows. What I learned from those movies was practiced at that creek. Its banks spilled the blood of wars and bad guys. The grass along its banks became hiding places for ambushing Indians. Rescues from imaginary quicksand made the get-away all the more realistic.

The bend where the tree was also became a place for piracy and deep-sea diving. My brothers and I couldn't walk into the water too far because soon it would be over our heads. Before the water got too dark to see the bottom, we could

see minnows zig-zagging in swarms around decayed leaves and rotting branches. Small crabs could also be seen shooting like arrows from one hiding place to another. They frightened us because everyone told us of their mean bite. Although we never saw them, we knew of blood suckers in the unseen depths of this pond. They had no shape or form but stuck to the skin and couldn't ever be taken off again.

We were too young to go fishing and never gave it any thought as a fun thing to do. One particular day we decided to walk along the creek as far as we could, past familiar places into fields that didn't even belong to us. Most of the creek was the same—very shallow, clear and sandy. We had walked for hours when suddenly we came upon a wide pool of clear water and saw a big fish. A fish so big we just knew none bigger existed! The water was so shallow that this big fish couldn't even swim as fish usually do but rather slithered about on its side. We couldn't imagine where it came from and how it had gotten there or even why it wanted to be there. The creek in front of this fish and behind it was too shallow for it to have come from either of those directions and the deep bend was "a million miles away."

How did it get there? What were we to do? What began as a lazy afternoon walk turned into a muddle of conjectures and irresolutions. Our only recourse was to ask Pa. He'd know how to handle it. We ran home over the hills, through the orchard, and over the wooden fence which surrounded our house. Bursting into the kitchen, we quickly let go of our story and soon we were running back with our Pa to the location of the big fish. Without any amazement or change of expression Pa just stepped into the creek, scooped up the fish and threw it onto the grass.

"Now what do we do with it?" was our question.

"Eat it!" was his practical reply.

And eat it we did. I don't remember the walk home, the cleaning or anything like that, except that the flesh tasted sandy and not very good. We never thought to ask Pa about how it might have gotten there, since he never talked much about things he didn't know anything about.

We continued to play around the creek till we moved. We moved many times, and I never did know what for. We grew up always expecting something or looking for something instead of enjoying the mud squelch between our toes or thinking of great big beautiful clouds and God's sky. The world was for playing in, and I can't ever remember my Ma and Pa telling us about its secrets. About how God makes grass grow or waters flow or rain fall. How the rain fills creeks and then dries again. All we knew was that a big fish ended up in a shallow pool in a creek with no beginning and no end.

1ST GRADER TO HIS:

*Lump of clay, if I made you
to be a teacup
and you'd rather be a saucer
you must accept the thing you are,
the way I made you.
I love your shape
and crooked nose
because I made you—this way—
Lump of clay, you're my creation
and not Miss Sarah Lee's.
She says to make things only
One day at a time,
So please don't ask me now to make
A lump of sugar for your tea,
There is no challenge in the art
Of anything that easy.
You are a wonderment of beauty,
Lump of clay, you hold together,
You have form and meaning
In my moving hands—I love you
Teacher loves you
Very much, she says to put you
In the light til you grow hard and firm,
Dear lump of clay,
You're made—that's done!—
Have patience til I make
A saucer that is deep enough
To hold you, strong enough
To let you hold
Yourself.*

—Sandy Van Den Berg

What's in a Film?

by Syd Hielema

A few weeks back Dordt had its first mini-film festival, nothing fantastic or sensational, just showing a couple of films that most students would not normally see. Both films were of the type that are generally not too popular, subtitled, with the usual European emphasis on an abstract reality rather than the typical American thriller. In addition, Calvin professor Dr. Kroese led discussion, helpfully pointing out that he couldn't make much sense out of the first film, and calling the second, a work which left many students bewildered and even shocked, a Christian movie.

Is the conclusion supposed to be that it was all a waste of time and money? Maybe, but I prefer to think that the festival was worthwhile simply because it left many of us confused, and thereby forced us to think about certain issues.

The first film, **The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie**, wasn't too thought provoking. Bunuel, the producer, portrayed the foolish life-styles of three upper-crust Parisian couples, showing how empty their lives were and finally probing their subconscious through dreams, effectively blurring whatever distinction there may be between dreams and reality. At times it was very funny, its confusion kept it interesting, but it didn't really make a tremendous impact upon the viewer. Even if you enjoyed it, you could forget it as you were walking out of the 'theatre.'

Bergman's **Cries and Whispers**, on the other hand, was perhaps too powerful. Intent on showing the difference between good and evil in a broken world, it portrayed evil as the personalities of two sisters who were living in hell itself. The 'good,' was not a joyful and uplifting 'answer' to the 'evil,' but the life-and-death struggle of two women to be able to give and take love in a world filled with angst, a bottomless fear of some unknown horror. The film had this uncanny ability to grab one's intestines and slowly pull them out.

It also raised a lot of questions. Why would any sane person want to make such a movie? Considering that it is made, why would anyone want to see it? Perhaps worst of all, how could someone with somewhat of a background in film criticism (Dr. Kroese) call it a Christian movie?

But one question is missing: how does **Cries and Whispers** rate as a work of art? For the fact that the film is a masterpiece places the other questions in a different perspective. It does not affect us so strongly because of its subject material, but because of its well-crafted artistry. Every twitch of an actress' lips, each trinket lying on the table contributes to the overall impression. One critic wrote that

every frame of the movie could hang in an art gallery. Its not really so surprising that **Cries** was named "Best Film of the Year" by the New York Film Critics in 1973.

This carefully worked out artistry demands a different attitude from the viewer. Usually when we go to a movie we expect things. We expect to laugh now and then, or to be in suspense, or to sympathize with the anti-hero. But a work of art asks to be received by an open mind, expecting nothing, realizing that a new work may well remain somewhat incomprehensible to the viewer after his first acquaintance with it.

Does that mean that when we watch something like **Cries and Whispers** we just take it all in, and if it bothers us we shrug our shoulders and say, "Oh well, its a work of art?" I hope not. To enjoy such a movie it helps to develop a sense of aesthetic appreciation: a sense of respect for the director's perfectionism, a sense of patience with that which is difficult to understand. As we become more familiar with a work, or films in general, we can begin to distinguish strengths and weaknesses, and at the same time form ideas as to what these strengths and weaknesses are.



Liv Ullmann
in "Cries"

Besides questioning a work's artistic value, we also ask, particularly on this campus, "Is it Christian?" Considering that we are Christians living in a world dominated by godless forces, the concern is understandable. But sometimes this question seems so crucial that it distorts our sense of aesthetic appreciation. It's too easy for us to write something off because it doesn't point out the saving blood of Jesus

Christ. **Cries and Whispers** is probably not a Christian movie, but its powerful portrayal of doubt and despair, love and hate, challenges us, forcing us to examine our own source of certainty, and so even serve to edify us. I tend to agree with Dr.

Kroese when he says that we should keep our eyes open for that which may help us, instead of quickly condemning that which seems contrary to our beliefs.

Lit Contest

Fine Arts is once again sponsoring a Poetry and Short Story contest for all interested Dordt students. The contest is being held in conjunction with the Fine Arts Literature weekend, coming up on April 1-2. Students are encouraged to submit all material to Mr. Cook either on or before March 12, the contest deadline. Please note following contest rules:

1. Please submit copies of each work to Mr. Cook.
2. Please attach a 3" x 5" card by paper clip to each entry, giving student's name, college year, and title of work.
3. Please double space all entries.
4. Contest deadline is March 19.

Winning entries will appear in a special Fine Arts issue of **Cannon**. All material submitted will be judged and then discussed in a seminar with the students, during the Literature weekend.

FEEDBACK

The Cannon staff encourages readers to respond to all published material. Letters may be dropped off at the switchboard.

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The Grandeur of God

Gerard Manley Hopkins has been anthologized in countless literature textbooks as a poet of technical and literary repute. After studying the bulk of his poetical work in a book called, **Landscape and Inscape**, (pub. 1975, Eerdmans) I have come to understand why. For Hopkins not only knew how to express himself in his poetry in a highly skilled and literary way; he also knew how to express his religious convictions without being overwhelmingly didactic.

I am very much opposed to didactic writing, where the sole intent of the writer seems to be one of evangelism. The intent of art is not to preach, or to convert, but to be art.

But perhaps I raise some doubts within your mind concerning the Christian poet, or writer. Perhaps you are also asking: To what extent should a Christian's religious convictions be reflected in, or determine the nature of his art? Can a Christian poet conceivably write a poem that does not in any way refer to God's name at all? Should the Christian poet seek first to develop his poetic skill as an artist, and secondly, if he feels convicted, to mention God's name? These are all good, legitimate questions and I have heard them raised before in connection with this problem. My answer is that we should grant the Christian poet and writer the freedom to develop his skills and talents as he sees fit. That is not to say that just because a Christian writes something that it is automatically Christian. What I mean here is that a Christian writer must be conscious of good literary techniques, and know how to use them to express what he is saying. Belief is not a substitute for talent. Neither is talent a substitute for what a man believes.

I would like to bring your attention to a poet, who in my estimation was not only a good poet, but a Christian as well. From what I can tell he also seems to be respected by both the Christian and non-Christian, which is quite an achievement for a Christian writer to make in today's culture. One reason is because of the prevailing view that a man's religious convictions only get in the way, warp, and restrict a writer's creative ability.

One of the main reasons for Hopkins reputation is the fact that he spoke simply, concretely, and honestly. Other poets have said that the world is beautiful. Some have even hinted at a god behind creation, or even claimed creation as a god. Others have talked bitterly and fatalistically about creation as they saw it. I think for example of a Thomas Hardy. Some poets, even Christians, have been quite vehement about their restless and uncertain feelings concerning God. Hopkins says simply:

"The world is charged with the grandeur of God./...It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil/Crushed. Why do men then now not reckon his rod?/Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;/And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil . . ."

Does Hopkins here draw a rosy picture of the world and man in relationship to it? No. But Hopkins does, through the use of his word choice, alliteration, and repetition of certain words, create a simple literary thought of how he feels. In a vivid metaphor, Hopkins has compared the world, nature, and its greatness, to a giant battery charged with the grandeur of God. What Christian could say it any better, without moralizing?

A criticism often aimed at Hopkins is his overabundant use of alliteration in the words that he arranges on a single line of his poetry. But it is my contention that one need not be an expert at tongue twisters in order to appreciate the sheer delight and wonder that his word choices often evoke.

The very nature of poetry, expressively as an art form, is to use language in such a way as to embody a very real sense and experience of the physical world. One makes the almost startling discovery that he actually seems to see the scene Hopkins is describing. Hopkins too had a sense of the original. Not many people think of the world's grandeur as gathering to a greatness, like the ooze of oil.

Hopkins also had a keen insight into words, their intended and often complex meanings, and the feeling he could convey by constructing them in the pattern that he did. He tells us that "he had haunting his ear 'the echo of a new rhythm,'" which he soon put into his verse. This new rhythm, so characteristic of his unique style, has influenced countless poets since to experiment with different styles and word choices.

What does all this have to do with a person's religious convictions? As I have stated before, some people argue quite vehemently that a poet's religious beliefs only hinder his writing. I contend that in the case of Hopkins, his religious beliefs and convictions served to enhance his poetry. It gave him a framework out of which to write, a sense of unity and coherence; it shaped his artistic experiences into a vital, living art. In some of his poem's God's name is not mentioned at all. Yet one can see and feel with Hopkins what his basic beliefs and thinking are. It comes out regardless, though in many cases it may not be as evident as the sun arising to awaken a dark and sleeping world.

Our primary concern is not to label something "Christian" or "unChristian." Christian literature does not need to defend itself.

If it is bad, it will be discarded. If it is well written, it will stand. Hopkins has proved that.

*The snow lies deep
on darkened hollows
and on its gentle coming
it has not missed
a single tree
or blade of beaten grass.
It is the sole traveller
on the backwood paths
and waits silently
for evening to come
and with evening—
animals,
that stop a breathless moment
to watch and worship
beneath a
lonely, dying sun.*

—Bonnie Kuipers

The Wedding Day . . .

The bride sat somberly in the bright but cluttered dressing room, her narrow fingers tightly clutching a bouquet of creamy roses and apricot orchids. A sole tear crept timidly down from her dusty blue eyes, on her motionless face, like a raindrop on a clear windowpane. After glaring at her dainty watch, she stiffly arose and rustled softly towards the window, dragging a stream of satin and lace behind her. "Where could he be?" she muttered angrily, as she scowled at the

by-passing cars pattering down the road. The screeching opening door interrupted her wearisome vigil. Her fluffy golden hair swooped gently over her face as she skirled around to face the groom. He caressingly wrapped his arms around her sagging shoulders and tried to console her. "Cheer up, Sweetheart. We won't need the PHOTOGRAPHER'S snapshots to rake up memories of today. The joyful images of our wedding day will forever be locked in our hearts."

Anonymous

Picasso: Cultural Hero?

by Marianne Scholte

Time magazine has called him the culture hero of the century. You can agree or disagree, but undeniably, Pablo Picasso was the major influence behind the biggest change in painting since the Renaissance.

Picasso changed the whole idea of painting as imitation. He considered appearance nothing more than as illusion, so he wanted his paintings to be realistic, in a way beyond that of surface likeness.



The Embrace

He wanted to know and express what was on the inside—the principles and the structures behind reality. His attempt to probe reality through painting is called analytical cubism.

Picasso was born in Malaga. He was a typical Spanish youth except for his extraordinary ability to paint. His father, a successful painter and teacher at the provincial school of art, taught him the “tricks of the trade.” However, when Picasso was 13, his father quit painting and gave his paints and brushes to his son. The implication was that the father had surpassed the father. At 14, he applied for entry at the Barcelona Academy of Fine Arts. It took the other candidates a month to do their examination drawings. He finished his drawing the first day and could find nothing to add to it. Two years later, he did the same thing at the Royal Academy at San Fernando in Madrid.

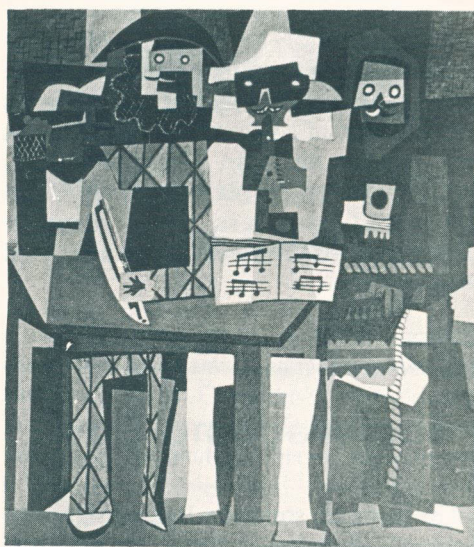
Picasso was unbelievably precocious technically, as well as in intelligence, insight, and maturity. He also had a very independent mind at a early age. Though he followed the prescribed courses of study, he detested those studies and insisted that what he had done before was much better.

Even at this age, Picasso tried to express what was on the inside of his

models—from the bitterness of his father to the innermost feelings of a nude model. His drawings were very much like those of the others, but he took care to include nothing but the essentials of what was before his eyes, no useless details. The characteristics of the future were beginning to form in his work.

When he was 19, Picasso moved to Paris. He soon managed to eke out a living with his portraits of sad clowns and famished urban-folk. In June of 1901, he exhibited his paintings for the first time. They clearly indicated his mastery over Impressionism and Pointillism—the innovations of the decades before him. A painting typical of Picasso's work at this time is “The Embrace.” Stripped down to its absolute essentials, it depicts an attic room, a powerful young man in a blue blouse, a young woman with a mass of chestnut hair. The painting conveys everything: home from work, united again, frank eagerness, human warmth, healthy sensuality. Other paintings expressed loneliness, futility or drudgery, but they're all extremely human.

After the exhibit in 1901 until the end of 1904, Picasso became more independent and worked in what is now called his “Blue Period.” He attempted to forget everything acquired by learning and to rediscover the spontaneity, the sources of art. He searched for a way to express himself directly and sincerely. It was for him a time of great personal privations and cold in winter. He painted predominantly in



Three Masked Musicians

blue as he experimented with the different shades. Typical of this period is a painting called “The Destitute Woman,” which asks for the meaning of a starving woman's life, of life itself.

In 1905, Picasso moved to Montmartre in the rue Ravignan, a place later to become famous as a gathering of young painters and writers. The change was so evident in his paintings that he entered into what is known as the “Rose Period.” The subjects of his paintings became warmer and more varied; the scene changed to the rose-intimacy of private homes and the space is constructed in curves organized around the human activity. The indication was that Picasso has settled down for the first time in his life.

After the Rose Period came the Gosol Period, a direct precedent of Picasso's launch into cubism. He broke with appearance in order to, as he said, be faithful to volume, while still trying to avoid the abstraction of pure volume. He wanted to tell more about the fundamental nature of the subject than appearance.



Harlequin and his Companion

showed. It was during this time that he painted the “Portrait of Gertrude Stein.” He commented that in time she would come to resemble her portrait (as he had painted what he saw and what he knew). He broke with both Classical and Impressionistic painting when he suggested that a painting need not simply serve for visual delight, but could be an object capable of suggesting emotion without being a picture of something.

But the major step of Picasso's work came in 1907 with his painting of “Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J.).” Picasso's contemporaries thought it was some kind of hoax intended to discredit modern art. They thought he was abandoning them and losing his hold on modern painting. Picasso had everything to lose and nothing to gain by his innovation, dubbed “cubism.” Neither he nor anyone else knew whether this would be the way to portray the essence of man.

An Epistle

"Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J.)" is a brothel in Barcelona. Picasso's painting was neither propaganda for prostitution nor was it an indictment. He intended it to be simply the essence, the structure for all time.

What is so disconcerting and scandalous about this art was not the technical revolution as much as the fact that Picasso attacked the human figure and discarded the conventional representation of man made in the image and likeness of God. More was involved than just an innovation in painting. The whole relation of man to reality and the conception of man himself was called into question.

Primitive art, including African masks and sculptures influenced Picasso and there is a great spiritual similarity to primitive art in his ideas. Nature, to Picasso, was the only true reality, man is basically biological. The personal was lost, since there was no longer a personal God. Man, animals, plants, and things are basically the same and should be depicted in the same way.

In keeping with the whole of western tradition, Picasso's cubist paintings were also rationalistic and intellectual. The figures were often geometrical since science and math are believed to be the most closely allied with reality. Yet, they contained a strange violence, an irrational overflowing emotion, as if he passionately wanted to break down the old image of man.

Picasso realized failure. In searching for the universal and general, he had lost the specific individual person, the "real." He found that it was impossible to see the absolute except through the specific.



Study from Les Femmes d'Alger

Picasso had created beautiful pictures which contained strange puzzles and no real content.

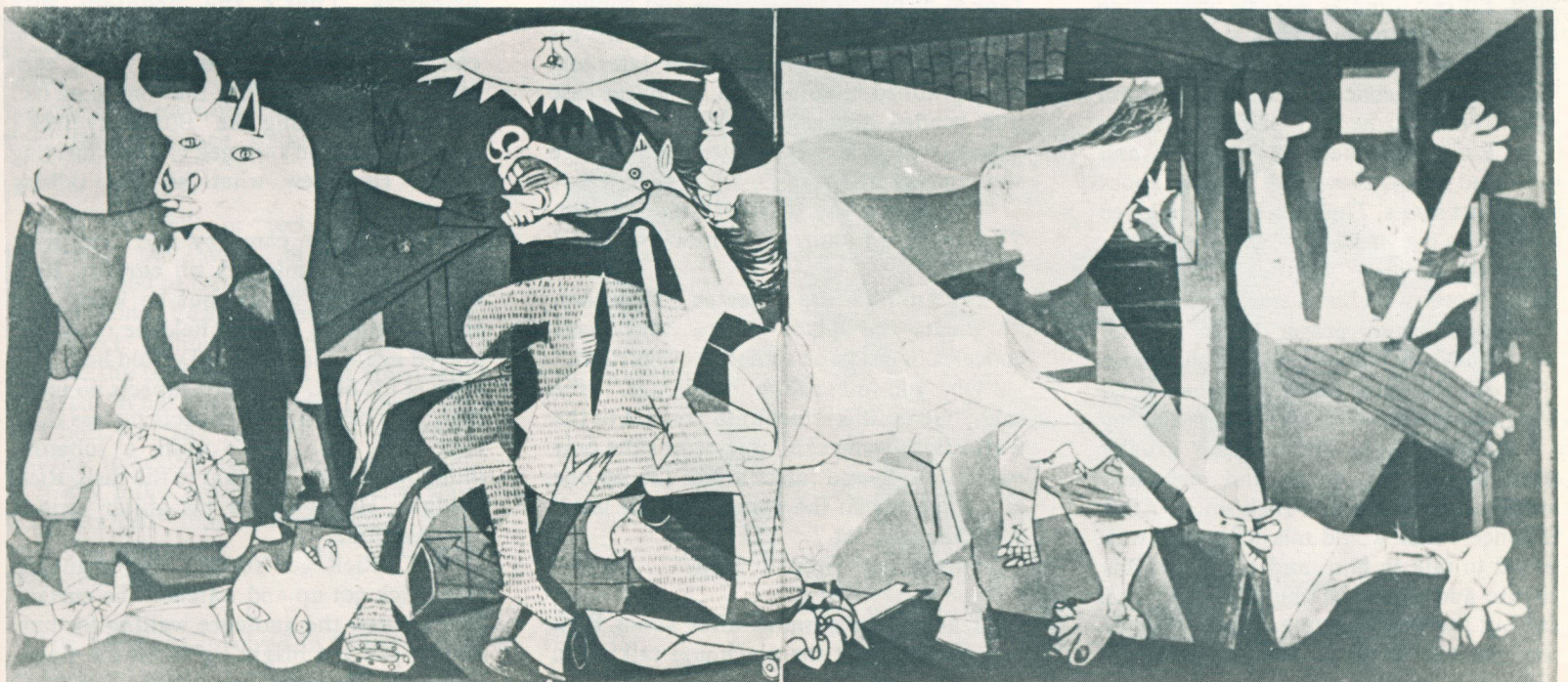
Picasso's use of space, his abandonment of perspective and depth is today called "acoustic." It is not entirely flat; there are remnants of the traditional way of handling space. The figures were broken into a kind of crystalline structure, merging with the background. You can't tell where the figure ends or the space begins as there are no contours. It's a beautiful puzzle.

When Picasso realized this, he needed another step—the ultimate breach. If there are not absolutes, no universal

principles, then the world is meaningless and absurd. This realization led to the final stage of cubism—synthetic cubism (began 1911-1912) where the artist felt free to play with the invented forms, satirically laughing or crying at life. The paintings become alienated from reality with a sense of absurdity. Though Picasso painted in a more normal way when he painted his love (to say that love is not absurd) these periods were few. After 1915 Picasso painted in two styles, one more classical and one very cubist and horrible.

During the thirties, Picasso used his art to express his opinions about the Spanish Civil War. At one point, Hitler sent the Nazi Condor Legion to Spain to aid the Fascists. The Legion began their bombardment in Guernica, a town sacred to the Basques, deliberately choosing an hour when all the people would be on the streets. Picasso expressed his rage in "Guernica," a great sweep of colorless grey. It is considered his masterpiece and his most human work—a picture of man destroying himself. But it is probably a call for revenge rather than repentance, since Picasso's friends, communists and anarchists also used terror as a weapon.

After half a century, the modern school of painting begun with Picasso has won command of current attention. Therefore, modern art and particularly Picasso's influence on it cannot be ignored. We must recognize modern art as a destructive force—one which wounds what is dear to people, namely their values, which laughs at life and attacks it. Though we must recognize Picasso's talent and the warmth and humaness of his early works, certainly he is not the cultural hero of the century!



Guernica

One Night Stand

by Steve Hoogerhyde

I submit this story painfully aware of its inadequacies. I do this because I feel that, in its aversion to didacticism in writing, the past writers in the Cannon have gone too far the other way. I expect [and hope] that this story will be severely criticized, but I also hope that it will stimulate others to attempt to write distinctly Christian literature.

If you believe in forever,
Then life is just a one-night stand.
Righteous Brothers

The sign by the right of the road said "Welcome to Elmwood" in black, crudely-lettered characters. Rick Thomas smiled wearily as he drove his battered old red Plymouth past the sign and into town. It was almost two o'clock on a hot August day and he had been on the road since nine o'clock that morning. Last night he had performed at Maple Grove, his sixth in a series of twenty folk concerts in southern Pennsylvania towns. Elmwood was his next concert and he was glad that he was finally there after having to make a detour and getting lost twice. Rick braked the car to a halt and accosted a passerby.

"Hey, is there a good hotel around here?"

"You bet. Just keep going up this street and turn right at the first stop sign. Can't

miss it."

"Thanks a lot!"

Rick followed directions and found himself in front of the Elmwood Hotel. He parked the car and went inside to get a room. Fifteen minutes later he was closing the door to his room with a sigh. Now to take a shower and then a much needed nap. Tonight's concert did not start until eight o'clock so he had plenty of time.

As Rick unpacked his suitcase and undressed for his shower he thought about his concert series. The idea had been given to him by a friend about four months ago. Rick was at first skeptical, but after talking it over with his pastor and with the Thursday morning prayer group that he went to, he decided to try it. And three and a half months later he did. He had been giving a concert every night except Sunday in a different town. The concerts usually lasted about two hours and consisted entirely of Christian folk-rock songs. After the concert Rick would talk to anyone who wanted to talk to him, and then pack his suitcase and guitar in the Plymouth and head out the next morning. It was a tough schedule, but so far it was enjoyable.

Rick turned on the water and began to sing in that best of all concert halls, the shower. It is amazing how good one sounds when singing in the shower. Rick was

singing Simon and Garfunkel's song "Homeward Bound," a song that had come to have new meaning for him. His rich baritone voice filled the bathroom:

On a tour of one-night stands,
My suitcase and guitar in hand
And every stop is neatly planned
For a poet and a one-man band.

Rick succumbed to a coughing fit when he unwisely sang into the stream of water, catching a mouthful in the process. That was real bright, he thought; I must be more tired than I realized. He shut off the water and towed himself vigorously. Then he went over to the window and pulled down the shade, set his alarm clock for six o'clock, and plopped down on the bed for a much-needed nap. As he lay there Rick prayed that God would be glorified in all he said and did. Having prayed this, he turned over onto his stomach and fell asleep.

At six the alarm buzzed, waking Rick out of a sound sleep. He shook sleep from his eyes and got dressed for supper. As in most small town hotels there was a dining room downstairs for the guests. Rick went down to eat, and half an hour later was back in his room. As he changed into his concert clothes he was beset by the nervousness which usually attacks performers before performances. Rick was always extra nervous before concerts because he knew he had only one chance to perform for a given audience. He always tried to make the most of the opportunity. Each concert was a little like life: you only get one chance, so make it good. As Rick finished dressing, he suddenly realized that he did not know where the concert hall was. I'll ask at the desk on the way out, he thought. Rick began to whistle a tune as he pulled on his boots and combed his hair. Slung a jacket over his shoulders in case it got cooler later on, Rick grabbed his Bible and his guitar case and headed downstairs. When he got to the desk he asked the girl on duty where the concert hall was.

"You mean the theater?" she replied. "You'll have to hurry; the movie's almost starting."

"No, I don't mean a theater," Rick said. "I mean the place where they have concerts or plays or something like that."

"Oh, you mean the playhouse," she said. "Go up this street until you get to the traffic light—you can't miss it; it's the only one in town—and make a left. Go up one block and it's on the corner on your left."

"Thanks a lot."

"Sure thing. Glad to help."

At about ten minutes after seven Rick was backstage at the playhouse talking to the manager and checking out the facilities. Everything looked fine, so the manager left Rick and went out front. Rick sat down and in his mind quickly

rehearsed some songs. Soon he could hear the auditorium filling with people.

As the people filed in, Rick thought about his audience. He wondered if they would be receptive, or hostile, or worse, apathetic. An apathetic audience really makes it tough on a performer. Audiences are so faceless, so nameless, thought Rick. I can't see them too well, but they can see me quite easily. I really have to reach out to them to make them come alive; somehow I must get to know them, to feel their emotions. Only by reaching out to them in love and compassion can I truly and meaningfully communicate to them. And I don't have much time in which to do it. In a situation like this I only get one chance. Once more Rick prayed to God to help him do his best and show God's love to this audience.

Rick crept over to the edge of the curtain and peeked out at the crowd coming in. There were not as many as he had hoped for, but for a town the size of Elmwood it was a fairly good-sized crowd. They're all out there waiting for me, Rick thought. They're waiting to see what I look like, to hear how I sing, and hopefully to hear what I have to say. They'll be watching every move I make, judging me and my words on the basis of this one concert because that's all they have to judge me by. "May those who seek You not be dishonored through me, O God," Rick quietly prayed, quoting Psalm 69. "Keep me from doing or saying anything that would hinder the gospel message from reaching these people."

Rick looked at his watch and noticed that it was a quarter to eight; fifteen minutes till curtain. Really, when you think about it, Rick thought, two hours is an awful short time; every minute is priceless. That's the problem with time—once you spend it, it's gone. You can't have it back and you can't earn more. What was it that that one poet had written? Something like "But at my back I always hear time's winged chariot hurrying near." He knew what he was talking about.

The manager came by and told Rick that it was ten minutes till curtain. Rick was still pretty jittery, but he knew that once he started singing he'd be okay. He prayed again that the Lord would help him to be at his best. The Lord expects no more than your best, but he expects no less than your best, too. That's quite a sobering thought. I hope I'm equal to the task, Rick thought. He tightened his guitar strings one last time.

"OK, Rick get ready," the manager said. Rick got up and watched the curtain rise. He saw the audience waiting for him and he saw the bright lights on the stage. He heard the manager introducing him, and he started to walk onstage.

"Ladies and gentlemen, will you please welcome Mr. Rick Thomas!"

A Classical Apology

by Mimi Ernest

Christmas was long ago, finals even longer, and the first weeks of December are only fuzzy memories among weekly assignments and daily mailbox stops. It is probable that up until now most of us have forgotten the review that appeared in the last issue of CANNON which took a look at this year's Messiah performance. The article activated quite a few people and generated a lot of feedback. I'd like to share some of the comments I heard.

The negative comments seemed to boil down to two main things. Firstly, that I was denying that each and every performer was actually singing or playing in a right spirit and to God's glory. Admittedly, I come from a non-CRC background and did not realize the rich and complex meaning of the word "glory" so I interpreted "the glory of the Lord" the only way I knew and the way I think Handel meant it. The "glory" is Christ Himself. Entitled Messiah, the Savior, the whole work deals specifically with Jesus Christ. It is divided into three parts: Jesus' coming and birth, death and resurrection, and finally our assurance of our salvation and Christ's coming again. The line "and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed" which is sung in the first section of the work, is taken from Isaiah 40:5, which seems to point prophetically towards Christ's coming. When I heard the glory of the Lord, that is Christ, was to be revealed on that Sunday it sounded odd to me. Truly, Christ may return at any time and in any place but when he does come, it will not be because the Sioux Center Messiah chorus or any other group performed so well that He was impelled to return. He will come in His own time.

Secondly, from discussions I had with various faculty members and students after the article appeared, I realized more clearly the two distinct and often irreconcilable ways of determining "good" music (or art, dance, writing, or films).

Is it the skill or technique of the performer, the "doer" of the art, that makes it good or is it the spirit in which the music is done? Can a performance be close to perfect technically but still "bad" because the performers are not spiritually involved? What if a performer is doing the very best he can? Are we still somehow justified in saying he is doing a poor job? Is it any more professional to have your body trained than your heart? Is it anti-Christian to demand technical competency?

The questions involved in "what makes good music" can and must be faced by the community as a whole. Unless this happens neither one side or the other will

be satisfied with the type of music and musical performances taking place.

The debate over criteria for good performances becomes more complex when we talk specifically about the Messiah because, although it is a classic piece of classical music, it belongs very much to millions who otherwise don't like classical music.

Perhaps in this case a compromise is acceptable. Next year, why not hold a Messiah Sing? Special soloists could perform the recitatives and arias but the whole audience would be invited to bring scores and sing the choruses. A number of guest conductors could even be invited from area schools to share the conducting duties and increase the feeling of community involvement. This way, everyone could share in Handel's work to the utmost.

A FILLING
Empty . . .
Like a peanut shell
With no peanut inside,
A tire
With no air,
A book
With no pages,
A boot
With no foot;
I heard
God's
A pretty good dentist.
They say
He has a good filler.
I have this cavity;
It needs a filling.
He'll give me
A Holy what?
I hope the drilling
Doesn't hurt.

—Dave Hogenboom



—Diane Vander Wal

OLD FOLKS

*I wish I were an old man.
I'd probably smoke a pipe then—
And nobody'd mind.
My eyes would have lines
from years of smiling;
My beard would be silver;
soft—so you'd have to touch.*

*I'd be a little fat;
so sure that I'd escape it.
But you would sit close like a dream is close;
A dream that rests in my peaceful heart,
When sleep drops my guard, and I trust . . .
Sitting on my knee as a moth that chases street lamps.
Your eyes would fasten
My face would shine;
to tell you stories—
And you would listen.
—So easy for old men,
And children.*

*I've watched them!
Old men, with their children's children.
Giants!
Memories!
Too quickly gone to heaven.
They make us sure it will be a good place.
Our time with them is never wasted.*

*But,
I'm a young man.
And it's hard.
Still as Christ is,
I will seek to know what
Makes an Old Man.*

*I wish you were an old woman.
I'd tell you you're beautiful then,
And You'd believe me, think me kind, and not so stupid.
Your eyes would have lines;
from years of smiling.
Your hair would be silver;
So soft—I'd have to touch.*

*You'd have time for me;
Though I thought it'd never happen.
And you'd sit close, like a dream is close,
For dreams rest in peaceful hearts
when sleep drops the guard, and we trust.
Of those cumbersome dreams
and unknown things that filled your time,
When you were young,
and only pretty,
You'd never miss them for your beauty.*

*I've watched them!
Old Women! Old Men!
Saints!
Memories!
Too quickly gone from reach.
Oh how they make us wish we learned our lesson.
Our time spent with them is never wasted.*

*But
You're a young woman,
and it seems hard.
Still as Christ is,
I will seek to know what
Makes Old Women.*

—Neil Culbertson

SUNSET CRUCIFIXION: CAMERA SHOT

*A tall reed in the wind sways slowly,
I will go home and take up the hammer,
Take up the nails and pound it to wood,
Pound it to wood, steadily, slowly;
A picture frame ready
To hang
On the wall.*

*A bright, crimson sun drips blood down slowly,
Clinging, it dies for the coming of day;
I will go home and take up the hammer,
Take up the nails and pound it in wood,
Steadily, slowly, a picture on wood,
Ready to hang
On my living room wall.
Here by the sofa—
High by the drapes,
Keep pounding, keep pounding
This picture
Called "Grace."*

—Sandy Van Den Berg